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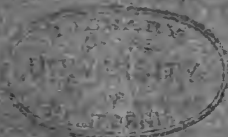
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THE ATTAINMENT OF SUCCESS

ADDRESSES BY

CHARLES RICHARD VAN HISE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN



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THE ATTAINMENT OF SUCCESS

BACCALAUREATE AND COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES

BY

CHARLES RICHARD VAN HISE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

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THE ATTAINMENT OF SUCCESS

BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

You and I, Class of 1907, four years ago entered as freshmen together. During these four years, my work has been such that I have given much consideration to the essentials of efficiency. You who are now to begin your life work will find it necessary during the coming years to become personally efficient. Therefore, today I shall speak of some of the fundamental qualities of efficiency which are necessary for success.

Success is assured to each of you who during the period of your education has acquired three fundamental qualities: punctuality, accuracy, and reliability.

How many during the four years that you have been at the university have met every engagement with your instructors punctually? Or, if any unforeseen emergency has prevented you from keeping an engagement, how many have seen that the reason has been promptly sent to the instructor with whom the engagement was made? Possibly more ayes would be heard if the question were asked: How many have taken as many cuts as they dared? How many been late at the lecture room or laboratory as often as they thought it safe? Probably the great majority find your places between these extremes. You of the mid-

dle group have not met all your engagements; you have intended to meet as many as could be kept without too great inconvenience to yourselves. You have kept your engagements to an extent that seemed reasonable to you.

Doubtless many of you think that an occasional failure to meet an engagement with an instructor in the university is a small matter, and in one sense this is true; but in another sense, not so. Those who during the four years of their work at the university have acquired the habit of meeting promptly and without fail every engagement have a great advantage over those who have followed the opposite policy, for in any vocation failure to meet your engagements promptly will be a heavy handicap. If your first job is with a large business or industrial house, such failure will not be tolerated. A man who takes a position in a bank, in a commercial house, in a manufacturing plant, may once fail to be at the appointed place at the assigned time and have that failure overlooked. If failure occurs twice, however, his position becomes precarious; and if it occurs three times without an extraordinarily good reason, dismissal is little short of certain. Therefore, the student who at graduation has learned with invariable promptness to meet his engagements, is many laps in advance of the man who has not acquired this habit, for the quality cannot be gained in a day. It is one which is slowly acquired by long and patient self-cultivation, continual demand upon one's self that he shall not be a minute late at an appointment, that he shall not be a day behind in the performance of an assigned piece of work. To acquire this quality one must be a severe taskmas-

ter with himself, must punish himself, at least mentally, whenever he lapses in this particular.

Professor Shaler, late dean of the Lawrence Scientific School, once said to me that in more than thirty years during which he had been at Harvard he had never failed to meet one of the many thousands of engagements that he had made with the students. A member of the Wisconsin state legislature who has been here for several terms recently remarked to me that thus far he had never missed a roll-call. If these things are of sufficient importance so that men of affairs regard with pride the fact that in the matter of punctuality and regularity in keeping engagements they have never failed, these qualities are of sufficient importance to engage the most serious attention of one who is at the beginning of his life work.

The second of the qualities which I wish to call to your attention is that of accuracy. How often have many of you said in reference to a piece of work: "Oh, I understood the principle; the mistake was merely a numerical one." It is undoubtedly of the first importance that you understand the principle, and in mere practice work it may not be important that the numerical computations be correct, but when the computations apply to the steel of a building, or a bridge, it is important that they be infallible. It may be very well for you to understand the principle, but if you are required to make a copy of an important contract, it is necessary that every word, aye, every point shall be exactly as in the original, for a single change may imperil great interests.

The quality of accuracy is indeed a rare one, but it is a quality which, like that of punctuality, may be

acquired by any one. Some of you may have failed to acquire a deep understanding of the principles of the more difficult subjects with which you have had to deal during your college course. Some of you may have been slow in your work, but each one of you may do whatever you do, with absolute accuracy. Accuracy is a mere matter of habit which may be acquired by the dullest man in the class; indeed, it often is possessed in a greater degree by the dull man than by the acute one, because he has taken pains in this particular while the readier man has not. But let the one who is swift in his work and has given little thought to accuracy, take warning. Unless you remedy the defect during the next few years, your duller companion who has acquired this habit will pass you in the life march.

The third of the fundamental qualities which are necessary for your success is reliability. By reliability I mean the execution of the orders of your superiors with unfailing certainty. This quality of reliability is more rare than either punctuality or accuracy. It is a quality of such importance that its possession is immensely appreciated by the superior officer. The great strain of an executive position is not so much in planning the work, as in seeing that the thing is done. A project is conceived; plans are formulated for its execution; the different parts of the work are assigned to various men. The chief would thenceforth have a comparatively easy time if he could be assured that all these men would do the work assigned to them. But he knows from experience that, if left to themselves, some of them will fail in the performance of their parts. Those who have

read history know how battles and campaigns have been lost, how nations have been conquered, because of the failure of subordinates to execute orders.

All executive officers will appreciate the immense relief one feels when he finds that among his subordinates is one to whom a task may be assigned with the certainty that it will be executed.

When any of you have attained this position in the confidence of your chief you need have no fear as to your future advancement. But how will you know when you have gained his confidence? The answer is easy—when he no longer questions you from time to time as to the progress of your work. You are asked to get off a shipment of goods at a certain time; you are asked to have an engine ready for the road at a definite date; you are asked to have the plans and specifications of a structure complete at a fixed time; you are asked for a report upon the accounts of a firm at a given day; you are asked to have a brief ready at a specified time. If, when one of these pieces of work be assigned to you, nothing further be said in reference to it, you have gained the confidence of your chief. He knows you are reliable, and the strain in his brain cells is relieved at *one* point. But so long as your chief asks if a task is being, or has been, performed, in order that he may be assured that his large plans may go forward, he lacks confidence in your reliability. Therefore, he must keep the matter in his mind, that is, he must not only do his own work, but must have the responsibility of seeing that you are doing your work.

Now this quality of reliability does not require talent. The dullest man in the class may have it; or

if he has it not, he may acquire it. Each one may become absolutely reliable in reference to the tasks assigned to him. This quality is even more difficult to acquire, however, and demands more rigid training of one's self than punctuality or accuracy, for it involves capacity to plan in advance, at least to a limited degree, as well as the systematic listing of all the pieces of work assigned and their frequent checking up.

No excuse will serve for lack of promptness, accuracy, and reliability. The late president of our university, Dr. Adams, gave me a wise definition for an excuse which since that time has dwelt in my mind. He said: "An excuse is a reason for a failure which if it hadn't occurred for that reason would have occurred for some other."

Many of you who have offered excuses to members of the instructional force, know that this definition fits your case. The excuses offered may have been accepted, or may even have misled the instructor occasionally. But excuses will not serve when results are required. When a man has failed to perform a task which a superior officer has assigned to him, nothing is gained by taking time in attempting to give reasons for the failure. The superior is interested only in the performance of the assigned work. If the work has been done, that is well. If it has not been done, it is of no avail to give explanations why this is the case. I do not mean to imply that occasionally one may not have sufficient reason for failure to perform an assigned task. Even the strongest and most resourceful is sometimes overcome by accident, or by forces beyond his control, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a failure might have been avoided by the

exercise of the qualities which I have described. In the rare case where failure is justified, the best statement to make to a superior is: "I have failed. I shall try not to fail again."

These then are the fundamental qualities leading to success—punctuality, accuracy, and reliability. He who possesses them may be sure that he will be in demand. Ten times as many men could be used by the world at the present moment as can be found who possess these qualities. Yet every member of this class may have all if he will. You who now possess them have an immense advantage over those who have been negligent in these respects. Rapid promotion is sure to come to you.

In the matter of advancement it is important to understand the principle upon which promotion is based. Each one of you should appreciate that the only possible way in which promotion can come to you is by earning more than you are receiving. If at the end of the year you go to your employer and say: "I am receiving \$50 a month and I have earned that and *could* earn \$60," he will reply: "How do I know that you can earn \$60? You have earned \$50 a month, and there you will remain." But if you can say truthfully: "I have been receiving \$50 a month, and have earned \$75 a month or \$100 a month," you have a basis upon which to expect promotion. No other basis will be recognized. All who are worthy of the places they occupy, whether janitors or heads of divisions, are earning more than they are receiving. These only may hope for advancement. Those who are earning just the amount they are receiving, their employers are hoping will have a call to go elsewhere,

and if there is not improvement, they will not wait indefinitely for the call to come.

While a reasonably successful career is assured to those who possess the qualities already mentioned, they are not sufficient to win the highest success. To accomplish this, three other qualities are required: resourcefulness, leadership, and faithfulness to trust.

One who has resourcefulness puts thru the thing assigned to him without calling upon his superiors for frequent directions. Two men may be given a like task, both of whom we may suppose to have the qualities of punctuality, accuracy, and reliability. The one will frequently go to his superior officer for further information and instructions, asking for advice and assistance, asking for authority to do this, that, or the other thing. The second man, the one who is resourceful, will not trouble his superiors from the time the task is assigned to him until the work is accomplished. He solves the difficulties himself as they arise. He has the courage to take responsibility to do the things necessary in order to accomplish the task. He understands that the direction to do a piece of work carries with it the authority to take the steps required to obtain the results expected.

One who is truly resourceful is sure of self, but not self-conceited. The self-conceited man thinks he has knowledge and ability beyond that he possesses. He thinks he knows how to proceed when he does not. On the other hand the man who is sure of himself, knows whether he does know. If he does not know, he finds out before going ahead. If his judgment tells him it is necessary, he will apply to his superior officer for further information or further authority, altho



he always does this reluctantly. But when he knows he has the information and the authority necessary, he solves difficulties as they arise, and reaches the desired result without taking the time and energy of his superior officer.

In a group of students it is easy to tell to which class a man belongs. The conceited man is known among his classmates as one who "stabs." In general he is a man who as yet has acquired no serious sense of personal responsibility. The man who is sure of himself, upon the other hand, frequently gains in the esteem of his instructor by quietly saying that he does not know when asked a question which goes beyond what may be reasonably expected, as frequently questions do when asked by the skillful teacher, with the purpose of leading to the further development of a subject.

In this matter of resourcefulness the efficiency and thoroness of your education will be tested. You who have neglected the opportunities for acquiring knowledge and training in your college work will be heavily handicapped in the matter of resourcefulness. You, upon the other hand, who have spent the best efforts of twenty or more years of your life in acquiring a thoro education, will be in a very favorable position to handle the problems assigned to you. As these problems arise, you will find no bit of knowledge that you have acquired too remote to be useful; and the mental power, the capacity to handle the work of the laboratory, seminary, or debating society, will be of immeasurable value to you in handling the real problems of life.

The student who is sure of himself in his college


work, who knows whether or not he knows the point in question, the man who in the laboratory or seminary has worked out the assigned problems without assistance, is the one who will prove to be resourceful in his life work.

The next quality with which we have to deal is that of leadership, i. e., the capacity not only to work out problems assigned, but the capacity to take the initiative and to work in cooperation with other men, and thus to lead them.

The ability to cooperate with other men is dependent to a large extent upon one's capacity to see the other fellow's point of view. The man who can take the point of view of the other fellow, who can appreciate his opponent's position, is one who will be a leader. Many a man has failed of the highest success, simply because he did not have this quality. It gives the power to understand sympathetically the laborer, or the miner, as certainly as the superior officer. One who has charge of men should be a chief in the best sense of the word. Such a man meets the lowest with no trace of condescension; he meets the highest with no trace of servility. He sees all men with level eyes.

The mining superintendent, who in the gallery cheerily says: "Good-day, Bill, how's your child?" "Good morning, Tom, hope your wife is better to-day," is the man who will be loved by the men under him, provided the interest is real and not assumed. With love for the chief who is on the level there may go the deepest respect, indeed even dread in case of failure to perform one's full duty.

The true leader has courageous initiative. He has



constructive imagination. He sees a line of progress perceived by no other. He finds a solution of a problem which no one before has been able to solve. These are among the highest of the intellectual qualities of the human mind.

While the man who has initiative and is a natural leader of men will treat with respect the suggestions of others, not infrequently he already will have given full consideration to the views advanced and will have rejected them. In such cases he is likely to adhere firmly to his own ideas. For if he be truly a leader, his ideas will often be an advance and an improvement upon those offered. Having worked out his own plans, having tested them in every possible way, he will adhere to them even if he stands alone. Thus thru all time have done all great leaders, whether warriors, statesmen, scientists, inventors, or moralists.

It is a common maxim that it is easier to destroy than to build up. It is equally true that it is easier to oppose than favor a departure from the regular procedure of the past.

But all progress consists in departures. It is easy to find men who are against many things, but hard to find men who are for many new things, and who will labor for these things with all the energy of their natures. The true progressive is always a man who is for more things than he is against.

At the same time he exercises good judgment in the selection of those things for which he stands and for which he labors. While sane judgment is needed in the selection of the things which one advocates, upon the whole the man who is somewhat erratic and is for

more things than he is against, is a more useful citizen than the one who thinks that the fact that a thing has been done in a certain way for a long time is adequate reason for its perpetual continuance. The man who always finds the present condition better than any suggested change is the man who obstructs advance until he is overridden by the wheels of progress.

Many men who have the qualities of leadership, in the sense that their ideas are in advance of those which are prevalent, lack the courage to adhere to their convictions in the presence of opposition. They are controlled by their fears. They have not the courage to say: "This is the right course to pursue; this problem has been solved correctly, I shall proceed." They say: "*It seems to me to be the right thing to do, but Mr. Blank gives many reasons against the proposed course, and I am afraid of this, or that, or the other.*" Or, if an enterprise be entered upon, some obstacle arises, strong opposition is met. Instead of stiffening in their plan, and calling into play all the faculties, knowledge, and capacity to deal with men, they yield their purpose. Obstacles exist but to be overcome! When one has a righteous cause, opposition should only make him more determined and resourceful in the pursuit of the end sought. One may fail temporarily, notwithstanding all his courage, energy, and ability, but temporary failure should only harden the iron of his nature into tempered steel to carry forward the cause to a successful conclusion, whether the contest be one of days, or months, or years.

On occasions of reversal or disaster to one's plans,

he should call forth all his energy, and with unflinching determination carry forward the fight. Grant said that when the battle had gone badly at the end of the first day, he always aimed to be the first to attack the following morning, and if this were accomplished, victory was almost sure to follow. This is the sustained courage of a great soul.

In athletic contests you all know the value of the qualities of which I speak, but the intellectual, moral, and religious battles of life will require of you vastly higher standards, and a more sustained spirit than can be exhibited in a physical contest.

While unfaltering courage and resourcefulness usually leads to success, failure may come to the best, and one must be prepared to meet disaster with a cheerful temper. A university education ought to do much for a student in the fine tempering of his character to meet adversity, so that he will still carry on the fight with unflagging spirit, with dauntless resolution. The great Milton, old and blind, in the midst of political misfortune, said: "I bate no jot of heart or hope." May you young men come up to this standard, and if occasionally the forces of nature or humanity are so strong that you are finally overcome, notwithstanding resistance to the uttermost at every step, you in defeat will be at peace with yourself, having done your best, having played the man's part; whereas if you surrender before you are wholly overcome, you will ever feel the sting of regret.

I strongly emphasize this quality of courage since many men of large intellectual qualities fail of the highest success because they lack its cooling and sus-

tained force. They are controlled by their fears rather than by their convictions.

High qualities of leadership therefore in any enterprise, industrial, commercial, political, moral, or religious, involve capacity to see the other fellow's point of view, firm adherence to one's own point of view, initiative in developing one's ideas in accordance with a positive program, and finally the courage to carry through that program whether it does or does not meet the approval of others.

Finally, the man who would achieve the highest success must be faithful to his trust. This faithfulness to one's trust frequently has a two-fold aspect. So long as a man is employed by a certain house, is affiliated with an organization, he must be faithful to the interests of that organization. But in this complex world it not infrequently happens that faithfulness to the organization with which one is connected is in conflict with faithfulness to the state and to the nation. As one goes upward step by step until he becomes associated with the policies of the organization, he may find them detrimental to the interests of the people. The question then arises as to whether he shall continue the relations of the past.

This is the point where more men of talent have failed in the last twenty-five years than at any other. In the great majority of cases when this point has been reached, a man has continued his connection and been faithful to the organization with which he is associated rather than to the nation. It would be easy to give a long list of men of high intellectual attainments, conspicuous for financial or political success, whom the people rightly mistrust. This parting of

the ways is indeed the time that tries men's souls, for high and determined courage, based upon profound moral conviction is required of one who would sever his connection with men with whom he has had long, close, and pleasant association, with an organization which has been profitable to him and which he believes will still further advance him.

Members of the Graduating Class:

Many of you now beginning your life work will within the next dozen years find yourselves where you must make this choice. May your habits of life and moral convictions under the teachings of this university be so developed that at this trying time you will be faithful to the nation rather than to selfish interest.

It has been said, "Many are called but few are chosen." I repeat to you, as I did to the class of last year, the words of Ernst Mach: "All are called and all may be chosen."

Whether you are chosen depends solely upon yourselves. Everyone of you may acquire those three fundamental qualities of punctuality, accuracy, and reliability, which will go far toward making your having lived in this world a benefit to mankind, and if this be so, you are among the chosen. Possibly not all of you may expect to achieve those qualities of resourcefulness and leadership which will give you high place, but many I trust will finally attain them.

All of you, I pray, may be found to possess the one quality necessary for success in the highest sense—faithfulness to your trust, faithfulness to the organization with which you are associated so long as you

continue the association, and faithfulness to humanity so long as you may live. Faithfulness to humanity is to my mind the highest ideal in this world, an ideal which each may attain, and if you live your life in accordance with this ideal whatever befall, your life has been a success and a beneficent influence in this world.

If I have spoken plainly and with warmth, it is because I have a deep interest in you and in your future. If I have seemed to chide, it is because I am so profoundly concerned in your welfare. You are the first class to graduate whose whole course has been taken in the university during the time that I have occupied the position of president. My hopes go out with you, as do the hopes of a father for his first-born.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Members of the Graduating Class:

In my baccalaureate address I have spoken of the fundamental qualities which lead to personal success. But personal success of the many is the success of humanity, and thus it is that, in the main, individual success is in harmony with service to the world. Indeed it is always true of the honest and faithful workman, whatever his station, that when he helps himself he helps others. The miner who digs out the ore, besides providing for himself, benefits those who own the mine, and thru the product of the mine benefits the world. The bricklayer not only wins bread for his family, but he helps to make a home for someone else. The farmer in addition to his personal gain furnishes food for those who pursue other vocations. The engineer who builds a bridge may increase his wealth and reputation, but he also makes it convenient for the multitude to cross the river. The lawyer who lives up to the ideals of his profession is a peacemaker and an aid to the courts in the securing of justice. The merchant who builds up his own fortune brings within the reach of all the products of the world. The teacher, the preacher, the investigator, at the same time that they are earning their livelihoods are primarily interested in the improvement of the human race, the amelioration of the hard conditions of mankind, the lessening of human suffering.

Indeed it may plausibly be held that he is a wise philanthropist who thru personal effectiveness advances himself in a manner which also advances others.

Thus it is that in pointing out the path of success for you, I have also pointed out a path which may be one of service to the world. It is right, therefore, for one to regard his own interests and those of his family, as well as those of others with whom he is immediately associated.

But, unfortunately, one may push his own interests without regard to the interests of others. As I pointed out on Sunday, self interest and faithfulness to humanity may be in conflict. Self interest may become so developed in one's nature as to make selfishness a dominant quality.

But since reasonable consideration for one's own interest may be easily and naturally consistent with the general welfare, there is no possible excuse for those who allow their own interests to override the interests of the community. Those who do pursue their own advancement regardless of others are the buccaneers, the pirates of our time. They should be "grilled" by public opinion. They should be restrained by law.

I have no doubt, however, that many men who now find themselves the objects of public opprobrium are greatly surprised at their positions. They had no idea that their selfishness which led to the disregard of others would also lead to the whirlwind of condemnation which now sweeps over them. Their moral senses have become so dulled that they are unable to appreciate the public point of view.

The above considerations lead to the conviction that the question of supreme importance for you, members of the class of 1907, is how to decide when faithfulness to self is in harmony with faithfulness to humanity. The answer to this question is that in pursuing one's personal success one must be subject to the highest prevailing intellectual and moral ideals.

There is difference of opinion as to the origin of the moral laws, but all are agreed that they should be laws which bring the greatest good to the greatest number. Not infrequently youth finds it difficult to understand the reason for some of the rules of conduct which the race has worked out, and sees no necessity for following them; but he should be extremely cautious in deviating from the rules of his people, for if they are closely examined and all the consequences are traced out, one is apt to find that these rules cannot be safely violated.

It is appreciated that as a race advances the ideals change under the leadership of intellectual, moral, and religious seers, but these leaders are not likely to regard the rules of the past as too rigid; they are far more likely to find them too lenient. Thus the only safe course for you is to adhere firmly to the highest ideals of the race with which your lot is cast.

But if our intellectual, moral, and religious ideas are in a measure functions of our race and of the period in which we live, is there not some simple principle which can serve as a sure guide to conduct in the pursuit of success and happiness for self in such a manner as to be in harmony with the general welfare? I believe there is such a basal principle, a bed rock upon which one may rest.

One should so live that the suffering of no human being shall be increased because of his existence; he should so live that the happiness of some others shall be increased. Putting it in another way, one should highly resolve that the world shall be a better rather than a worse place for other human beings because of his existence in it.

When in doubt as to the path to pursue one should ask the question: "Will this course increase or decrease the happiness of others? In pursuing this course shall I injure another?"

I have much confidence in the salvation of all those who on the final day can feel, "The world is a better place because I have lived; those human beings with whom I have had relations have been happier because of my life." It is my hope that whenever the last call may come to any of you, you may humbly, calmly, and hopefully feel that your life has been a benefaction to the world. No higher aspiration than this is possible.



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